An Examination of the Benefits, Methods, and Influences of Presidential Communication

An Honors Thesis (POLS 404)

by

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an in-depth study of presidential communication. The relationship between the president and the people is a major building block of the American democracy, and we can gain a greater understanding of it by analyzing why the president communicates, how he does so, and what influences this communication. The paper begins by examining why presidents communicate, and lists both the benefits and drawbacks of presidential communication. The middle section is a study of the many methods presidents can use to communicate with the public. The third and final section looks at the various factors that influence how a president communicates. By studying the benefits, methods, and influences of presidential communication, we can apply this information to other political offices to examine their communication; we can also use the information gathered in this paper to further understand the role that communication between the president and the people plays in the American political system.

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INTRODUCTION

Communication from the President of the United States is a phenomenon that almost all citizens encounter on a regular basis. The president is everywhere—from our television sets to our computer screens to our newspapers. Like anyone in a political office, it is necessary for him to communicate with his constituents. And, as the most prestigious and well-known political figure in the nation, he communicates on a much larger scale and more constant basis. However, while citizens regularly take in this communication to some degree, they rarely stop to think about the communication in an in-depth manner. They do not consider why the president communicates with the public in the first place, what different ways he can do so, and what factors influence his communication.

This paper will examine those issues and give presidential communication an in-depth analysis. First we will examine why the president makes an effort to communicate with the public. We will look at what the objective of this communication is and what benefits it can bring, as well as the drawbacks that this communication can present. Denton says that presidential communication is a great source of power for the president, as it allows him to "define, justify, legitimize, persuade, and inspire" (1988, p. 524). We will show how using this power can serve to both benefit and harm the president in his goals.

Next we will study the methods the president uses to communicate. Among these methods are speeches, interviews, and press conferences, as well as communication on the internet and through the media. Most American citizens have likely seen the president

communicate to them in at least one of these ways, and we will analyze the ways in which these various methods can be used to accomplish the goals that are stated in the previous section.

The third and final section will look at the factors that influence this communication. Every president communicates in a different way, and there are many reasons for this, including the make-up of his staff, his personality, and the time period in which he served. These different factors can affect which of the established methods the president chooses to use, and can help or hinder in his ability to reap the benefits that effective communication can bring.

There are two reasons this research is important. As stated earlier, the president does occupy a political office, and, like every politician, must exercise traditional communication and persuasion (Denton, 1988). Therefore, while the communication is on a smaller scale, the benefits, methods, and influences of presidential communication can be applied to other office holders such as governors and members of the U.S. Congress.

The second reason for this research is that it can help us further understand our political system, as communication from the Chief Executive to the citizens is at the heart of our democracy. The president often will go directly to the public with his ideas instead of negotiating exclusively with Congress and other political figures (Jacobs & Burns, 2004). This is especially illustrated through the phenomenon of the "permanent campaign," where governing and campaigning have become intertwined (Kiousis & Stromback, 2010). This has created more incentive for the president to communicate with

the people—not just for votes, but for their support on any the various issues he proposes. This relationship between the president and the people is what our democracy is built on, and we can gain a greater understanding of it by analyzing why the president communicates, how he does so, and what influences this communication.

WHY DO PRESIDENTS COMMUNICATE?

Before we examine how presidents communicate and what influences their communication, we must first look at why presidents communicate with the public at all. There are several benefits that regular effective communication can bring, as well as a few drawbacks. Typically when the president engages in communication, it is to influence some other person or people, such as the voters, bureaucrats, members of Congress, or other nations, or to increase public support of his policies or media coverage of his agenda (Kiousis & Stromback, 2010). The drawbacks of such communication can be that it can, at times, antagonize Congress; it can require much effort with little benefit; and certain presidents may not be strong overall communicators or strong at certain ways of communication, which can lead to more negative effects than benefits.

One major objective of presidential communication is to increase the power of the president. An increase in power allows the president to implement his policies, "regardless of the wishes or actions of other policy elites" (Benze, 1981, p. 471). Obviously, the implementation of his own policies is a major goal of any president when taking office, and a president who communicates well is more likely to achieve this goal. Benze surveyed career executives and bureaucrats, asking them to rate certain personal characteristics and political skills in terms of how important they were for increasing the

power of a leader. He found that courage, intelligence, vision, and self-confidence were the most important personal characteristics for a powerful leader to show (Benze, 1981). These are all traits that can be conveyed through effective communication. In addition, he also found that relating to Congress, maintaining the trust of the public, and selling his programs and agenda were, according to career bureaucrats, the most important political skills for a president to possess (Benze, 1981). As we will see, these skills can be showcased through presidential communication, and doing so will increase the power of the president and allow him to better implement his agenda.

However, even the most powerful president cannot implement his agenda or accomplish any of his goals if he is unable to influence other policymakers—particularly members of Congress—into following along. The easiest way to do this, of course, is through direct communication, such as the State of the Union. However, we will see shortly that effective communication can also be used to increase a president's approval rating or get the public behind his agenda; doing this will increase his influence on Congress and boost his ability to pass his agenda. A recent example of this was President George W. Bush's use of communication to persuade Congress (and the American people) to support the United States going to war in Iraq; by persuading them that this war was essential to United States national security, President Bush was able to accomplish a goal that may have been impossible without presidential communication (Pfiffner, 2005).

Of course, the president also has the option to bypass Congress and communicate with the American people instead. By influencing the public through communication, he

can empower them to pressure Congress to follow along with the presidential agenda; this influence can also help in any electoral objectives the president may have. Presidential influence on the public can be shown through the work of Freud, who concluded that groups are "highly suggestible" and that a leader "can strongly affect people's beliefs, feelings, and behavior" (Goethals, 2005, p. 551). If a leader is to be successful in influencing a group's behavior, he must display charisma, conviction, and an ability to inspire (Goethals, 2005). A president—who is the leader of a large group called the American populace—can do just that through communication. By using his words to articulate "an appealing vision of the future" and provide "encouragement and meaning for what needs to be done," a president can have a tremendous amount of influence on the behavior and beliefs of the public (Goethals, 2005, p. 551). One influence on communication designed to affect the public is the use of public polling; we will examine this later in the paper, but this operation helps the president know exactly how to communicate with the public in a way that is most likely to increase his influence on them.

Similar to this premise, communication can also help the president increase his approval rating. The president can "exercise direct control over what citizens think of him" through his rhetoric (Druckman & Holmes, 2004, p. 775). Since a higher approval rating increases his influence in Congress and provides a boost to any electoral goals, presidents will use communication to raise their approval ratings. Certain communication methods can also play a role in issue-specific approval ratings. Kiousis and Stromback found that both speeches and press conferences lead to an increase in foreign policy job

approval, while there is a negative linkage between press conferences and economic job approval (2010). Therefore, they suggest that presidents hold press conferences to increase their foreign policy approval ratings and give speeches focused on the economy in order to increase their economic job approval (Kiousis & Stromback, 2010). A president who is struggling with his approval ratings in one of these areas will likely try to use one of these methods to increase his standing.

While increasing power and approval ratings and gaining more influence with Congress and the public is certainly enticing, another reason for a president to communicate is that the alternative of *not* communicating is not at all enticing. Presidents often assert that ineffective communication—or not communicating all—is a contributor to a failure in governing (Eshbaugh-Soha, The politics of presidential speeches, 2010). While there are some soon-to-be-discussed downsides to communicating, not communicating is even more dangerous, since not only is nothing getting done, but it also does not even look as if the president is trying (Klein, 2012). This is a dangerous message to send to the American people, and, at the very least, presidents will communicate to avoid the appearance of not trying.

While most of the goals of presidential communication deal with improving the president's ability to govern, there are electoral objectives as well. These include reelection for a first-term president, helping the party in the midterm elections, and possibly influencing who his successor will be; in addition, most (if not all) presidents are concerned about their long-term historical legacy. Effective communication can affect all of these goals. While effective communication on the campaign trail is obviously

imperative for reelection, we've shown that effective communication in office can help secure the president's policy goals and increase his chances for reelection (Eshbaugh-Soha, The politics of presidential speeches, 2010). A high approval rating—partially brought on by effective communication—can help in the reelection effort as well, and can also make the president a more appealing campaigner for his party during midterms, which could help in bringing about a more politically friendly Congress. Rottinghaus also found that presidents often use their second terms to cement their legacy and sell their policies through television interviews and speeches (2006). They can also help elect a successor who will further their agenda, which will likely improve their historical legacy (Rottinghaus, 2006). Both of these can be done through effective communication.

It is now clear that there are many benefits a president can obtain through communication. However, presidential communication does come with a few downsides that must be considered as well.

One problem presidents run into with communication, especially a speech that is supposed to be persuasive, is that it can antagonize Congress. Our system almost always requires a president to work with some members of the opposing party in Congress. However, by trying to sell the public on his agenda, the president can make it harder for members of the opposing party to work with him. This anti-persuasive effect that communication can have on Congress ends up making it more difficult for the president to accomplish his goals (Klein, 2012). However, this effect isn't inevitable for all presidential communication, and therefore isn't always a factor.

In addition to harming relations with Congress, presidential communication can also present problems with the public as well. First is the problem that the communication may have no effect at all, despite the time, resources, and political capital that went into making it happen. For instance, the State of the Union, which we will discuss later, receives a great amount of attention each year, and is usually the most viewed presidential address of the year. Despite all this, the speech rarely has a substantial effect on a president's public standing (Klein, 2012). If this is true of a speech as large and widely-viewed as the State of the Union, one can assume smaller and lower-profile speeches also have little-to-no effect. However, we will soon see that these speeches do have merit, despite their lack of influence on the public, which can be found in other methods of communication.

There are also times when speeches and other forms of communication do have an effect on the public, but in a negative way that undermines the intended goal of the communication. For instance, some speeches may unrealistically raise the public's expectations of the president's ability, which leads to a decline in public support if and when those expectations are not met (Eshbaugh-Soha, The politics of presidential speeches, 2010). Also, presidents will sometimes speak publically about their failed policies, which draws attention to them; even using some form of communication (such as a speech) to alter these policies could backfire if the media uses those words against him in some way (Eshbaugh-Soha, The politics of presidential speeches, 2010). Similarly, presidents can sometimes attempt to sell unpopular policies, and in the process make an unpopular statement that causes negative press attention (Rottinghaus, 2006).

These mistakes, however, are often avoidable if the president and his team considers them in advance of the speech.

Along with speeches, press conferences can also present problems to presidents. It is more difficult for the president to control the agenda and discussion in a press conference setting, which increases the chances he will be "boxed into answering a question on an unpopular issue," which will again bring negative attention from the media and harm his ability to fulfill his agenda (Rottinghaus, 2006, p. 729). As we will see in the next section, this problem can also be diminished in advance by altering the structure of the press conference.

After examining the benefits and drawbacks of presidential communication, it is safe to say that the positives far outweigh the negatives. Effective communication can help the president in pushing his agenda through Congress and garnering support from the public, as long as he avoids the pitfalls listed above. Next, we will look at the various methods presidents can use to communicate with the public in order to accomplish their goals.

WHAT METHODS DO PRESIDENTS USE TO COMMUNICATE?

We've now seen just what presidents hope to achieve through communication, and what pitfalls they should avoid in the process. Now we need to look at how presidents actually go about engaging the public. There are a variety of methods available to the president in terms of when, where, and how they communicate, and presidents often act strategically when choosing a method (Rottinghaus, 2006). This section will examine these various methods.

The idea of today's "permanent campaign" is a significant theme amongst these methods. Many of the methods use various tactics often associated with political campaigns, even when the president is not explicitly running for reelection or campaigning for other congressional or presidential candidates.

This "permanent campaign" did not come into existence until the late 1970's. When Jimmy Carter first took office, he was advised by political strategist Pat Caddell to "approach governing the same way he had approached running for office" (Menefee-Libey, 2001, p. 383). This coined the term "permanent campaign." Prior to this, the government was directed by a system of bargaining among leaders of various interest and demographic groups; this bargaining was mediated by the leaders of the parties (Menefee-Libey, 2001). This system was interrupted during elections, but reverted back after the winners were sworn in. However, today's system is governed by politicians, interest groups, and advocates who use their own political resources to push their interests. The campaigning that once interrupted the system now *is* the system (Menefee-Libey, 2001). Among other changes, this new system has increased the importance of new communications technology, public relations, and polling techniques in order for the various players to be able to advance their interests. These "campaign style" communications have not only influenced presidential communication, but have at times replaced traditional presidential communication.

This is especially true of maybe the most prominent and well-known form of presidential communication, speeches. These speeches are the "focus of modern presidential governance" and are "how presidents primarily lead Congress, the media,

and the public" (Eshbaugh-Soha, The politics of presidential speeches, 2010, p. 2). Speeches offer presidents a chance to speak directly to citizens without the media distorting their words with interpretation and editing (Young & Perkins, 2005). This lack of filter gives the president maximum control over his ability to influence the public. As noted earlier, these speeches do not often have a large measurable impact on the public. However, they are a major way for the president to show commitment to a policy or concern over a political issue, which allows him to exhibit leadership and help set the public agenda (Eshbaugh-Soha, The politics of presidential speeches, 2010). And while the actual influence may be minimal, presidents do often receive a bump in the polls after a nationally televised address (Eshbaugh-Soha, The politics of presidential speeches, 2010). As demonstrated earlier, this increase in approval can enhance the president's stature with Congress and help him in pushing his agenda.

Speechmaking has become one of the most-used tools in presidential communication. The number of presidential speeches has significantly increased over the last half century (Eshbaugh-Soha, The politics of presidential speeches, 2010). This shows that presidents have found speeches to be more and more useful in helping them to accomplish the goals.

There are two particular goals that speechmaking is especially useful in helping to accomplish. The first is to respond to adverse political conditions. When political conditions become unfavorable for a president, they often deliver more speeches in response (Eshbaugh-Soha, The politics of presidential speeches, 2010). Presidents can

often reset the agenda with one speech, and, as mentioned above, increase their polling numbers in the process.

Presidents can also use speeches to improve their approval on foreign policy. While speeches over domestic matters such as the economy have little-to-no impact, speeches over foreign policy give the president a chance to shape the agenda on that subject and exhibit leadership in the process (Kiousis & Stromback, 2010). As the Head of State and the Commander-in-Chief, the president has much more influence on foreign policy than he does over domestic policy, which Congress plays a much larger role in. In addition, the public has less direct experience with foreign policy than they do with the economy, and domestic and economic policy is covered much more consistently and comprehensively in the media than foreign affairs are (Young & Perkins, 2005). As a result, presidents in need of a boost in foreign policy approval can use speeches over the subject to improve their numbers and show leadership.

While the president gives a large number of speeches every year, his annual State of the Union is easily the most high-profile and widely watched. Due to this, it is considered a separate method of communication, since it brings different potential benefits and drawbacks than a normal speech.

There are certain goals the president hopes to achieve through a speech that can only be done through the State of the Union. Rarely do any other presidential speeches receive this type of media anticipation or full coverage (Young & Perkins, 2005). The speech is carried on all major networks, and watching it is considered a "civic duty" by most Americans, many of whom do not devote much attention to any other presidential

speech (Klein, 2012). This large audience allows the president his best chance each year to exhibit leadership, set the public agenda, and persuade citizens to support his policies. The president also uses the State of the Union to make his biggest policy announcements (Klein, 2012). These advantages simply aren't there with a typical presidential speech, which is why the State of the Union receives so much attention from the president and his staff.

However, the advantages of the State of the Union address are not what they once were. As mentioned earlier, despite all the attention and viewership the speech receives, the actual measured impact on the public is minimal. In addition, while the speech is still televised by all major networks, ratings for the address have declined steadily over the last few decades, mostly due the rise of cable television (Young & Perkins, 2005). This lessens the impact of the speech and lowers the ability of the president to influence a large amount of people. While the State of the Union is still a significant way for the president to communicate with the public, it is no longer the strong technique that it used to be.

Before a president even gives any speech, he and his writing staff can engage in a method called "priming" a speech to increase its impact. Priming is done by emphasizing certain issues in speeches so that the public will focus on those issues when evaluating the president (Druckman & Holmes, 2004). Obviously, a president will choose whatever issue he believes he has performed strongest in. Priming gives special weight to that issue, leading to increased media attention toward it. Since people do not have the ability or the desire to consider *every* issue when evaluating presidents, priming a speech with

the president's strongest issues will encourage them to consider these issues—and not other issues, some of which the president may not be as strong in—when evaluating the president (Druckman & Holmes, 2004). By priming certain issues, the president can emphasize his strong suits, and evaluators will do the same. This can lead to more favorable media coverage and possibly an increase in approval, both of which bring the president many benefits when trying to fulfill his goals.

However, issue priming has its limitations. It primarily works only on more knowledgeable citizens who can decipher and understand at least some details of the different political issues (Druckman & Holmes, 2004). Fortunately for the president, he can also engage in image priming. This is done by emphasizing foreign affairs, which highlights the president's position as the nation's "leader" (Druckman & Holmes, 2004, p. 762). By showing that he is the leader of the nation, he can also show attributes such as "strength, toughness, and leadership", all of which will increase positive perceptions of him (Druckman & Holmes, 2004, p. 762). This image priming will enhance his reputation among all citizens, including those who are least knowledgeable about political issues.

We've now looked extensively at speechmaking—including the State of the Union—as a method for presidential communication, and how priming those speeches can increase their effectiveness even more. However, while speechmaking is arguably the most important method, there are also many other techniques the president can use to communicate with the public.

One method that is similar to speechmaking is the president's weekly radio address. These addresses—broadcasted nationwide on Saturday mornings—began with President Ronald Reagan. Reagan's communications director, Michael Deaver, arranged eight addresses in hopes of maintaining a "direct line to the American public," as well as utilizing Reagan's radio background (Sigelman & Whissel, 2002, p. 138). The media and public responded favorably, and they became a regular event during Reagan's time in office. Reagan's successor, President George H.W. Bush, did not continue these broadcasts, but President Bill Clinton brought them back when he succeeded Bush. They have continued ever since, and have been expanded into audio and video podcasts that are posted on the internet.

Like speeches, these brief, conversational addresses give the president a chance to speak directly to the American people on a topic they choose, without having to worry about any potential distortions brought on by the media. However, they garner very relatively little attention from the media, and are rarely used to make major policy announcements (Sigelman & Whissel, 2002). Despite this, they do offer the president an alternate way of communicating with the public on his own terms.

While speeches and radio addresses allow the president to speak directly to the people in a prepared fashion, there are also methods that allow the president to reach other parts of the populace. However, these methods remove the advantage of letting the president control the agenda and require him to think and speak extemporaneously, without the use of a script. Two of the most widely used communication methods (besides speeches) are interviews and press conferences.

The president regularly sits down for interviews with traditional news sources, such as the major news networks. While these interviews are commonly held, they typically only appeal to a limited, politically-knowledgeable segment of the population, many of whom take in presidential communication in other forms (such as speeches that are broadcast on the cable news stations). However, since the 2000 election, many political candidates and officeholders—including the president—regularly sit down with entertainment talk shows as well. These shows include the late-night comedy shows, the morning shows, and programs such as *Oprah*.

Viewers of these types of shows are generally much different than those who regularly watch "traditional" news programs, such as *Meet the Press*. The viewers of entertainment shows are often less interested and engaged in politics; however, they do "vote in significant numbers" (Baum, 2005, p. 214). Therefore, these interviews do not focus on policy debates or political issues, as an interview on CNN would. Instead, they focus on the president's personal qualities, which appeals to the apolitical audience while still allowing the president to present himself in a positive light (Baum, 2005). Such interviews give the president the advantage of appealing to a different audience, and are presumably a bit "easier" than having to discuss more complex policy issues with a political reporter.

Another significant part of the president's communication toolbox is the press conference. Press conferences give presidents an opportunity to charm the media and public while showing his mastery of the issues; he can also use planted or unplanted questions to explain or defend his policies in a way he could not do in a speech (Paletz &

Entman, 1980). However, the usage of press conferences depends on the president. Some, such as Kennedy and Clinton, enjoyed them and took advantage of them; others avoided them because they had something to hide, because they disliked the media, because they preferred other communication methods, or because they have an uneasy style that is unappealing in front the cameras (Eshbaugh-Soha, Presidential press conferences over time, 2003; Paletz & Entman, 1980).

However, when a president does decide to have a press conference, there are ways he can avoid the problems press conferences can present: an inability to control the agenda and an increase in the chances of being forced to answer an unpopular question. Unfortunately for them, they can no longer use President Franklin D. Roosevelt's tactic of not allowing reporters to quote him without permission, nor do they have President Eisenhower's option of not releasing the tape of the conference until after it is over (Hess, 1998). However, there are still techniques that can be used in today's media and technological environment. Since reporters will often hint at what questions they might ask during the daily "gaggles," the president's staff can tell him to avoid certain reporters who are likely to ask an unfavorable question (Eshbaugh-Soha, Presidential press conferences over time, 2003). Presidents also have the option to "announce press conferences just hours before they take place, leaving reporters less prepared to ask tough questions" (Eshbaugh-Soha, Presidential press conferences over time, 2003, p. 349). In addition to this, he can also begin the press conference with a prepared statement, which gives the president a chance to partially set the agenda and reduce the time left for reporters to ask questions, while also reaping most of the benefits of a typical speech

(Paletz & Entman, 1980). And of course, the option to cancel or not schedule press conferences always exists; it is but one of many methods the president can use to communicate.

There also exist more direct methods for the president to influence his media coverage, and thus use them as a way of communicating with the public. One way to do this is through news releases. These news releases lead to increased attention to the office, and "are often printed verbatim in news coverage" (Kiousis & Stromback, 2010, p. 8). While certainly not enough to be a focal point of the president's communication strategy, these news releases do aid in getting word of his actions and priorities out to the public through the media.

The president can also use the media to control communication through manipulation and secrecy. The president and his staff can control which reporters are granted access, and they can make that access conditional. For instance, they can impose rules designed to limit what the reporter can write about if he or she is granted access, or can deny access to reporters they fear will report information they do not want reported (Paletz & Entman, 1980). Even if they are granted access, reporters risk the chance of being used for anonymous political attacks or revelations (Paletz & Entman, 1980). By controlling who has access to the president and the White House, the presidents can assure, at least to some degree, that what is reported in the press is what he wants to communicate to the public.

Secrecy with the media is another way to accomplish this. Aside from just not telling the press (and, probably, the formal spokesperson for the administration), the

president can also use executive privilege or national security concerns to withhold information (Paletz & Entman, 1980). This is, of course, difficult to do. The reverse option also exists: to reveal secrets, but in a strategic and timely way. This could be done in order to intimidate a foe, protect or harm someone's reputation, or simply to push the policy agenda and increase public support (Paletz & Entman, 1980).

A third way to manipulate the media into providing favorable coverage is for the president to take advantage of his stature as president. Because he is newsworthy and the press is under pressure to file constant news about him, the president can produce the news he wants on his terms, knowing that it will be covered (Paletz & Entman, 1980). This is an especially useful tactic when it comes to emphasizing his role as leader of the nation. The president can "participate in a ceremony that involves his role as symbol of the nation's identity" by representing the United States abroad or welcoming another nation's leader to the White House (Paletz & Entman, 1980, p. 421). This not only forces the press to cover him while he is acting as the leader of the nation, but it also leads to coverage that is often deferential to the stature of his position.

The final method of presidential communication that we will explore is one that has only been around since President Clinton took office: the use of the Internet, particularly the White House website, whitehouse.gov. This website is the president's primary tool to communicate with the public via the Internet.

The White House website was launched on January 20, 1993, the day President Clinton took office. During Clinton's campaign for the presidency in 1992, his team created a primitive, text-only campaign site that included candidate biographies and the

text of speeches (Owen & Davis, 2008). While this site was viewed by few Americans and received almost no attention in the press or from voters, it was the impetus for the first executive branch website that would be launched by the same Internet team upon Clinton's inauguration (Owen & Davis, 2008). As with any new form of communication that has no established blue prints, the strategies used with the website in its early years were a combination of careful planning and trial and error (Owen & Davis, 2008).

The site has grown and evolved rapidly in the two decades since. During the nineties, the website was fairly limited in its capabilities; there was very little "interactivity, interconnectivity, scope of content" and visual and audio material (Owen & Davis, 2008, p. 659). These areas have gradually been improved since, with a large amount of growth and evolution taking place during President George W. Bush's two terms.

As the capabilities of the website have increased, so too have the various uses of the site. In the early years, the site served as "comprehensive repository of documents and policy statements" for the administration, offered a "log of presidential events and activities" and "became a portal for citizen access to government information and services" (Owen & Davis, 2008, p. 663). The site has been formally upgraded and rereleased several times, with these upgrades bringing new features such as sections for the press and for children, a "virtual library of White House documents" for researchers, and an area devoted to the history of the White House and biographies of the presidents (Owen & Davis, 2008, p. 663). These features, along with a steady stream of news and announcements regarding the president and the rest of the executive branch, give the

president several new methods of communication that were not available in the pre-Internet era.

Of course, the White House website does not come without a few drawbacks. The White House must balance the transparency and interactivity that is expected with an Internet website with the problems the website can bring to achieving certain political and policy goals, not to mention the national security issues it can lead to (Owen & Davis, 2008). The use of a White House website also increases the standards of accountability for the president, as it archives all of his administration's words and actions (Owen & Davis, 2008). These concerns are minor, however, in comparison to the benefits that an Internet presence brings the president, and as time goes by and administrations get more experienced with Internet strategies, the president's Internet presence is likely to increase.

The methods we have examined above are the major ways the president communicates with the public. However, it is not an exhaustive list. Other techniques include coordinated speeches and interviews from other members of the executive branch, including the Vice President, Cabinet members, and prominent advisors to the president; intentional leaks to the media; publishing editorials written by the president (or another prominent official) in the newspaper; and the relatively new platform of social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter (Young & Perkins, 2005). These would be possible subjects for future researchers of presidential communication.

In addition to knowing why the president communicates, we've now looked at many different ways he can communicate with the public. However, there are a multitude

of factors that influence presidential communication, and it is important to examine these factors to fully understand presidential communication.

WHAT FACTORS INFLUENCE PRESIDENTIAL COMMUNICATION?

One of the most influential factors in any presidential action or policy is the staff that he surrounds himself with. This is particularly true for presidential communication. Both the overall staff and, especially, the communications staff play a large role in determining how a president communicates with the public.

Other than the communications staff, most of the president's staff does not deal directly with his communication strategy. However, these staffers can still play an indirect role in his communication, by helping to determine what policies he will be communicating and influencing the situations where communication would be beneficial or possibly required. The role of the staff in general is to make sure that the president receives enough information to make a decision, and then implement this decision after it is made (Fullington, 1977). How effective the staff is at performing these tasks determines how the president ends up communicating his actions to the public.

While the general staff does play a role in influencing the president's communication, the part of his staff devoted exclusively to the communications—the White House Communications Office—obviously plays the largest and most significant role.

Though the current White House Communications Office was not created until the Nixon administration, it is modeled after the U.S. Office of Government Reports (OGR) from the administration of Franklin Roosevelt. The main purposes of the OGR,

which was created in 1939 as a part of the Executive Office of the President and fully authorized in 1941, were to distribute and gather information in all fifty states through the Division of Field Operations, and to collect and summarize print news and radio coverage throughout the country through the Press Intelligence Division and Radio Division (Garnett, 2009). The OGR was disbanded in 1948 due to Congressional fears that it would serve as a propaganda arm for President Roosevelt; however, it showed its importance by promoting the New Deal, and its purposes and functions now live on in today's White House Communications Office (Garnett, 2009).

Both the Office of Government Reports and the White House Communications Office had similar purposes and duties. President Roosevelt used the OGR to facilitate the exchange of information: it improved his ability to gather information from citizens, and made it easier for his administration to transmit information to the citizens (Garnett, 2009). Similarly, today's Communications Office enables the president "to communicate directly with citizens, interest groups, and regional and local media without depending on the national news media to report (and filter) information" (Garnett, 2009, p. 983). Along with this, the office is responsible for advising the president and his staff on how the media is covering (or will cover) his policies and actions, and for managing relations with the press (Paletz & Entman, 1980).

In order to accomplish these tasks and best serve the president, the White House Communications Office uses a complex organization system. This system is divided into three tiers (strategy, operations, and implementation) and four different units (Press Office, Office of Communications, Office of Media Affairs, and Speechwriting). The

three tiers are similar to those in other areas of White House staffing: there are those who develop the goals (strategy), another set of staffers who decide how those goals should be translated into events (operations), and a third set who carry those plans out (implementation) (Kumar, 2003). The four departments each have different responsibilities through the process, but work toward the same goal.

The process begins with meetings with the president, where he works with the staff to determine a strategy for the months ahead. These decisions are then discussed at the operational level to figure out how to make this strategy real through daily themes and events (including those discussed in the middle section of this paper, such as speeches and press conferences), in hopes that this strategy will provide the president's communication a direction for the next few months, regardless of outside events (Kumar, 2003). From this point, there are further meetings to plan and carry out the events and schedule daily messages that will give the press one thing to cover each day (Kumar, 2003). It is through this process, one in which the president is but one of many players, that the president is able to communicate with the public. It is easy to see why the makeup of the communications staff is so influential in determining how a president communicates with the public.

The four units of the White House Communications Office each play a role in this process, whether through the strategy, operations, or implementation parts. The Press Office—which includes the press secretary—mostly focuses on the day-to-day operations of relations with the press. This office "plays little role in the overall communications strategies," but is where "plans developed elsewhere for daily coverage are carried out"

(Kumar, 2003, p. 378). This is primarily done through the daily briefings the press secretary conducts with the press.

On the other hand, the Office of Communications handles both daily and more long-term strategy. This office creates the focus of the day, plans the strategy and events for the months ahead, and coordinates with the rest of the White House and executive branch (Kumar, 2003). This is also the unit that discovers how well the strategy is working, and responds to this information in kind (Kumar, 2003).

The Office of Media Affairs is responsible for dealing with regional and local media. This unit also deals with special press units (for instance, Hispanic news organizations), radio, and managing the website, and is instrumental in follow-up for presidential events by discovering how the event played in the location it took place (Kumar, 2003).

The Office of Speechwriting plays a fairly self-explanatory role in the communications process: writing speeches. This unit is in charge of drafting remarks for any public event the president speaks at, including high-profile events such as the State of the Union.

It is again important to note how small the president's role is throughout this process. This shows just how much influence the Communications Office has in presidential communication.

The relationship between the communications staff and the rest of the staff—especially the policy and political advisors—is very important as well in determining the effectiveness of presidential communication. The two sides will often "vie for control

over the words of the president," though both sides have their own expertise to provide, whether through determining the actual policy that will be discuss or by deciding how to frame that position in the speech (Vaughn & Villalobos, 2006, p. 683). The process of writing a speech begins with a member of the president's political staff (such as the Chief of Staff) presenting the speechwriters with guidelines over what should be included in the speech. The speechwriters then draft a speech using thematic and rhetorical devices, after which the president's advisors critically read it to make corrections and suggestions; this back and forth goes on until the two sides agree that the draft is acceptable, or the date of the speech arrives (Vaughn & Villalobos, 2006). This process is more proof of the importance the entire staff plays in crafting the president's words and therefore influencing his communication.

While the staff is obviously an incredibly important influence in presidential communication, it is not the only one. Kumar opines that staffs reflect the president in which they serve, and that their strengths and weaknesses mirror his strengths and weaknesses (2003). If the president's staff reflects his personality, it is safe to say that his communication with the public will also reflect his personality.

There are those, however, who argue that personality plays little or no role in how a president does anything, including his communication. Scholars of this belief say that the institutional authority granted to the office by the Constitution is where the president's power comes from, and the president's actions, and the results of those actions, are products of the office, not of the unique man (Benze, 1981). The president's personality cannot have any effect on political outcomes because of "excessive public

expectations and other external constraints" (Lyons, 1997, p. 792). If this belief is true, then the personality of the president would obviously have no effect on his communication.

However, there is also a large contingency of scholars who believe the opposite: that presidential personality matters—sometimes a great deal—in terms of how a president operates. These scholars instead believe that the power of the office that comes from the Constitution is limited, and that the personality of the president—including his "reputation, persuasiveness, political skills, and self-confidence"—is what effective leadership depends on (Lyons, 1997, p. 792). This means that the personality of the president matters a great deal in determining political outcomes, and that personality does influence presidential communication. For the purposes of this paper, we will assume that this view is correct, at least to some extent.

The most extensive study of presidential communication was done by James David Barber. Barber examined presidential personalities along two dimensions: activity versus passivity in effort toward implementing his agenda, and positive versus negative in terms of emotional reactions to exercising their presidential powers (Lyons, 1997). These two dichotomies lead to four different personality types for presidents. Active-Positives are presidents with high self-esteem and confidence who are open to learning from their experience and are flexible with their approach, such as Franklin D. Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy. Active-Negatives are compulsive, petty, and inflexible presidents who do not enjoy their work; this group includes Woodrow Wilson, Lyndon Johnson, and Richard Nixon. Passive-Positives, such as Ronald Reagan, are dependent on their

advisors, to the point that they could be pushed around by powerful ones. And Passive-Negatives, who are rare in today's political scene, did not enjoy their governing and therefore were not very engaging in office; a historical example is Dwight Eisenhower (all four of these descriptions from Goethals, 2005).

Using these four personality types, it is evident that Active-Positive presidents, with their high self-confidence, would be the best communicators in office. On the other hand, Passive-Negatives are likely to be the worst communicators of the four, as they have neither the desire nor the ability to communicate effectively. Active-Negatives are a mixed bag, with their activeness in communicating offset by their negative emotional reactions to such communication; they are definitely not as effective as Active-Positives. Passive-Positives have potential to be somewhat effective communicators because of their positive reactions to presidential actions, but it would depend on the effectiveness of their staffs. At the very least, President Reagan proves that Passive-Positives are capable of effective communication.

Barber's work shows that presidential communication is influenced, in part, by the personality of the man in office. This factor changes with each president, of course. However, another potential influence on the president's communication is constant for every president, and that is the natural cycle of a presidency, from the first term to the second term, and from different periods in each term.

Presidents typically enjoy a "honeymoon" period from the media at the beginning of their first term. During this time, the president gives the media maximum access and receives positive coverage; both he and the press have the same goal of publicity for the

new administration's key players and policy priorities (Paletz & Entman, 1980). It is important for the president to take advantage of this honeymoon period, as it inevitably fades and his media coverage becomes more negative. However, the first year is still a key one for communicating. More speeches are given during this year as presidents "ingratiate themselves to the public" through the office's "bully pulpit", and these speeches during the first year (and the rest of the first half of the first term) are less likely to be "congruent" with public opinion (Rottinghaus, 2006, p. 727). This trend ends as the president campaigns for his party in the midterm elections, which is quickly followed by a shift into reelection mode, when campaign-style communication becomes even more prevalent and the president's words become more congruent with public opinion.

A reelected president does not enjoy the same honeymoon period at the start of his second term that he did at the start of his first term. However, he still usually has momentum and confirmed popularity, and he will look to utilize this through regular communication (Rottinghaus, 2006). The president will continue this constant communication to fight off any public torpor that occurs in his second term as he becomes a "lame duck" (Rottinghaus, 2006). Later in his second term, he again switches in to election mode to campaign for his party's president nominee and various other candidates, completing the eight-year communication cycle.

Historical trends can also influence how a president communicates. One factor is the regime that is holding power when the president takes office. This factor has two components: whether the president is affiliated with or opposed to this established regime, and whether the established regime is resilient or vulnerable in terms of power

(Goethals, 2005). Like the Barber personality study, these two components create four situations.

A president who takes office during the reign of an established regime that he is affiliated with will have a relatively easy time communicating. He can practice the "politics of articulation" and continue the current regime's policies—which he agrees with—with very little troublesome opposition (Goethals, 2005, p. 560). However, they are also limited in this respect, as they cannot betray the regime by showing independence or innovation in their communication. A president can also be affiliated with a vulnerable regime, in which case he will have little credibility and will mostly devote his communication to trying to salvage what's left of the regime (Goethals, 2005).

A president can also come into office opposing the current regime. If this regime is resilient, then he will deal with maximum opposition. These presidents are not trusted by the current regime and have to compromise with it to get anything done (Goethals, 2005). When these presidents communicate, they are often forced to be either combative or defensive in the face of their strong opposition. However, presidents can also oppose a vulnerable regime, which gives them the best chance for effective communication. They have the opportunity to use communication to repudiate the current regime and bring about a new political regime (Goethals, 2005). A president has no control over whether the regime that is in power when he takes office is one he affiliates with or opposes, nor can he control if they are resilient or vulnerable. However, the power of the regime and his relationship with it play a great role in how he communicates throughout his time in office.

Regime affiliation and strength is not the only historical factor that influences presidential communication. The general time period in which the president served also matters a great deal, as presidents from different eras communicate in different ways. Changing dynamics in technology, the media, and political culture are among the major causes of this constant transformation. For instance, early presidents used written statements as their primary form of communication instead of public speeches (Denton, 1988). In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, coverage of the president reflected the dominant news medium, and the president had to respond in kind. For the first half of the 1900's (through Eisenhower's presidency), print journalism was the major news source; from the 1960's to the mid 1980's, it was the three broadcast television networks, followed by cable television from the mid 1980's to early 2000's when the Internet became the main medium for news (Hess, 1998). Presidents from one era communicated differently than those in another era; an interview with CBS meant more to President Kennedy than it did to President Clinton, while President Taft never had the option of using Twitter to communicate.

As trends and innovation in media have changed, it has affected presidential communication. The media's development has lead to an increase in the size of the president's potential audience and provided them more "immediate access to the public" (Denton, 1988, p. 525). However, this development has also created some problems for presidential communication. Thanks especially to the proliferation of cable television and now the Internet, the modern media covers soft news over hard news and has a smaller audience for news in general, leading to relatively less coverage of the president

(Richardson, 2010). This is a major change from broadcast television's heyday in the 1960's, when network's expanded their evening news and made their programming more Washington-oriented (Hess, 1998). Ratings for presidential speeches and press conferences had fallen consistently in recent decades. This is due more to the fact that the public now has more viewing alternatives as opposed to other factors, such as a lack of satisfaction or interest in politics (Young & Perkins, 2005). As television has become less useful as a communication medium, presidents are forced "to find other methods to be heard over the cacophony" (Young & Perkins, 2005, p. 1203).

Television's decline as a helpful method of presidential communication is not the only influence modern media has had on how presidents communicate. Cable television and the Internet now tend to focus more on negative news over positive news (Richardson, 2010). This trend has changed how presidents communicate as it has made them more likely to discuss good news when they speak because the news media isn't likely to do so (Eshbaugh-Soha, The politics of presidential speeches, 2010). Presidents prior to the advent of cable television and this trend did not have this problem, and were able to communicate both positive and negative things when they spoke, depending on the situation.

Along with changes in the media, historical changes in the political culture have also influenced how presidents communicate. Over time, the public's expectations of a president have changed. Modern presidents are expected to "set goals and provide solutions to national problems" (Denton, 1988, p. 525). This has affected presidents in that their communication must now address these expectations.

In addition to the major factors we've discussed thus far, there are some smaller factors that affect presidential communication. Two of these—a decline in approval ratings and problems with achieving legislative success—lead to more presidential communication, particularly in the area of policy speeches (Eshbaugh-Soha, The politics of presidential speeches, 2010). A poor economy, on the other hand, will lead to less of these speeches, and, somewhat surprisingly, scandals do not have any impact on how often a president gives a policy speech (Eshbaugh-Soha, The politics of presidential speeches, 2010).

The final factor that we will examine is the relatively modern use of polling by presidents. Presidential communication is especially affected by public opinion and perceptions. This communication is two-sided, and the president speaking to people is only half of it. The other half is what they learn from the people, which affects "what presidents say, how they say it, and where they make their comments" (Jacobs & Burns, 2004, p. 537). This is maybe the most major influence on how the president communicates, and affects what methods he chooses in order to obtain the benefits that presidential communication can bring.

Polling in the White House began under President Kennedy, though it was primarily limited to policy polling. The use of polls grew under Kennedy's successors; however, polling on policy issues declined while polling on personality and other non-policy considerations greatly increased (Jacobs & Burns, 2004).

This use of polling—especially personality polling—helps the president not only achieve electoral goals such as reelection, but is also helpful in allowing them to fulfill

their agenda, which is among the major goals of presidential communication. Results from polling can help administrations learn how to "activate the public's concerns and change American's evaluation" instead of just determining "the actual state of public preferences" (Jacobs & Burns, 2004, p. 550). Information about public opinion that is ample and trusted plays an enormous role in the strategy that determines what presidents do in public (Jacobs & Burns, 2004).

CONCLUSION

The knowledge that public polls play such a large influence in how a president communicates reinforces one of the major reasons this research was conducted: to emphasize the role that presidential communication plays in our democracy. By using information from the public to decide how to communicate, he is using their thoughts, ideas, and voices to help determine how he uses communication to implement his policies and agenda. While the other influences listed also play a role, and the method used helps decides how effective the communication is, the voice of the American people ultimately decides how the president communicates, and in the process, what the outcomes of governing are.

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